SOMETHING NEW -- This handsome deep-textured siding holds paint and stain well, and is highly resistant to peeling and blistering. It can be easily repainted or restained if a color change is desired or when it's time to repaint the original finish.

Suburban Gardener

Weeds Or Wildflowers? Points Of View Vary

By BETTY FRANKEL

Are they weeds or wild flowers?

It all depends on your point of view, but Mother Nature spreads her summer bounty with a generous hand.

Fields and roadsides are frosted with Queen Anne's lace and spangled with sky-blue chicory and golden browneyed susans. Daylilies stretch in blazing ribbons, pink milkweed borders swamps and ditches and monarda forms spreading clumps of soft lavendar blooms.

The first goldenrods, already gilding the meadows, are a startling reminder of summer's inexorable progress toward fall.

Henry David Thoreau, the 19th Century New England naturalist is reputed to have said that if he had been traveling far from home and were suddenly set down near his beloved Walden Pond he could accurately determine the date to within two days. Among his chief clues would be which flowers were in bloom, which just coming into bloom and which past their prime.

Many of our common wild flowers are not natives at all, but were introduced into this country from Europe. A few were brought here to be cultivated, but most came by chance. Before the advent of modern medicine, many were used as remedies for all sorts of ailments. Now they are not used, but merely brighten the summer landscape, bringing joy to the nature lovers.

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PERHAPS the most ubiquitous of all is the Queen Anne's lace (Daucus carota). Its lacy white discs are seen along every roadside and in every vacant field, but it is not a native American plant. It is known in England as bird's nest flower because of the way the flower forms a cup as the seeds start to develop. It is from this wild plant that the cultivated carrot was developed and early versions of this root vegetable were not far different than what can be found today by digging up one of these roadside beauties.

Chicory is another European import. The bright blue flowers bloom from July to October. In Europe the root of this plant is roasted and used for a coffee substitute or addative, and close relative is endive, a popular salad green. If chicory, growing in a pasture, is eaten by cows it will give the milk an unpleasant taste.

Sow thistle (Sonchus arvensis) blooms along roadsides and in fields from July to October. The flowers are like dandelions on tall plants. In former times it was thought to be a cure for deafness. Wild lettuce (Lactuca canadensis) is similar but with smaller flowers. This plant has a milky juice that the pioneers used for a sedative and the Indians used to treat warts.

BROWN EYED SUSANS (Rudbeckia hirta)--or black-eyed susans as they are known to some people--are attractive enough to deserve a place in the garden. In fact, gloriosa daisies, a rather new garden flower with large gold and brown flowers, is merely an improved horticultural variety of brown-eyed Susan.

The tawny orange daylily (Hemerocallis fulva) was brought to America by the early colonists as a treasured garden flower.

It found conditions here to its liking, escaped from the eastern gardens and took off westward. It's now one of the more common wild flowers in this area--and one of the most attractive. In the Orient the daylily is cultivated and the buds are cooked and eaten as a special delicacy.

Sweet clovers (Melilotis) come in both yellow and white. They form bushy thickets topped by slender spikes of small pea-like flowers. Although these are now common roadside plants, they were originally introduced into this country from Europe as a forage plant and as a honey plant for bees. In the 17th century these plants were used as a cure for just about everything from stomach aches and headaches to inflamation of the eyes, and they were thought to "strengthen the memory and comfort the head and brain."

SAINT Johnswort (Hypericum peforatum) has many bright yellow five-petaled flower on a stiff much-branched stem. "Wort" incidentally, is an old Eglish word that means "plant" and is part of the name of many common plants.

Bugs Control Dutch Elm

Tiny bugs could help stem the $40 million Michigan loses each year due to Dutch elm disease.

Michigan State University entomologists are canvassing Europe for strains of elm bark beetle parasites which can easily adapt to Michigan's climate. Parasites from eastern Austria are receiving major attention because weather conditions there are similar to Michigan.

The over-all goal is to develop a well-balanced parasite complex in Michigan to control the elm bark beetle which transmits the disease.

Soil, Water Problems Can Plague Homeowners

Among the more serious conservation problems around the suburban home are surplus water management and disturbed soils, according to Daniel F. Kesselring, District Conservationist of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.

Land that may never have had soil and water conservation problems when in its native state can well be plagued with them when converted to suburban uses, says Kesselring, adding:

"Rain that once fell on open land now falls on roof tops, driveways, and paved streets. Even the best land can be jeopardized by uncontrolled water runoff. It can quickly rob areas of valuable surface soil, smother green lawns with silt deposits, flood homes and basements, and cut jagged scars in steep slopes and drainageways.

"To control runoff, be sure that the soil is shaped so that water drains away from the house, and that low areas are filled. Excess water from adjacent properties can be diverted away from the home by the construction of small diversions and terraces.

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"Erosion can be prevented by covering the ground as completely as possible with growing vegetation or with some substitute cover like mulch, burlap, flagstones, or gravel.

Areas that must carry heavy runoff need to be permanently paved or protected by special turfs, riprap, or other means.

"Water runoff isn't all that is troublesome. During construction, the very nature of the soil around the home may have been changed drastically. The surface layer of the ideal soil has a deep layer of loamy, or crumbly, material that contains a rich mixture of decomposing organic matter.

"But the surface soil in the average subdivision is usually less than ideal. The original soil may have been scraped off, or mixed with and buried under clayey or sandy subsoil when the land was excavated and graded. Tar paper, wood scraps, siding, brick, plaster and other materials that limit plant growth are often found just under the surface of the soil.

"When locating sites for shrubs and trees, it is a good idea to dig a much larger hole than necessary to check for buried debris. At the same time the soil can be checked for root penetration and permeability.

"Permeability can be determined by filling the hole with water. It should all disappear within 24 hours.

"In some cases it may be necessary to refill the hole with good quality soil that is in good physical condition and is fertile.

"Soil can be improved by mixing peat moss, compost, or other organic material with it and by adding plant food based on accurate soil tests. For example, azaleas need an acid soil and roses a nearly neutral one.

"A bulletin published by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service called 'Soil Conservation at Home - Tips for City and Suburban Dwellers' contains more information on solving soil and water conservation problems. To get this bulletin write Soil Conservation Service, Box 642, Wayne, Michigan 48184."